

New rules to protect consumers' hard-earned cash

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- clamp down on cartels and other business practices that stifle competition, levelling the playing field for businesses doing the right thing
- government gives watchdog more powers to support consumers and crack down on rogue traders – meaning better products, greater choice, and lower prices

Reforms to shield the public from rip-offs and boost competition have been announced by the government today (Wednesday 20 April).

Plans include making it clearly illegal to pay someone to write or host a fake review, so people are not cheated by bogus ratings, and clearer rules for businesses to make it easier for consumers to opt out of subscriptions so they are not stuck paying for things they no longer want.

Prepayment schemes like Christmas savings clubs will have to fully safeguard customers' money through insurance or trust accounts. This will prevent scandals like Farepak, in which the business went bust and thousands of people lost their money.

To beef up the enforcement of consumer protections, the government is delivering on its manifesto promise to give the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) enhanced powers to tackle rip-offs and bad business practices.

The CMA will be able to directly enforce consumer law, including new powers to fine firms up to 10% of their global turnover for mistreating customers. This replaces going through a court process which can take years.

Competitive markets create a level playing field for businesses and give consumers better products, greater choice, and lower prices by encouraging companies to compete for customers. The CMA will have stronger tools to tackle companies colluding to bump-up prices and to combat 'killer acquisitions' in which big businesses snap up rivals before they can launch new products or services.

Consumer Minister Paul Scully said:

We're making sure consumer protections keep pace with a modern, digitised economy.

No longer will you visit a 5 star-reviewed restaurant only to find a burnt lasagne or get caught in a subscription in which there's no

end in sight. Consumers deserve better and the majority of businesses out there doing the right thing deserve protection from rogue traders undermining them.

The average UK household spends around £900 each year influenced by online reviews and spends £60 on unwanted subscriptions.

The reforms underline the government's commitment to seizing the opportunities provided by leaving the EU and adapting to the lessons of the pandemic, which has accelerated the trend towards online shopping and cast a spotlight on bad business practices like fake reviews.

Strengthening consumer protection and enforcement

The government is bolstering consumer rights, strengthening the enforcement powers of the CMA, and supporting consumers in resolving their own disputes without having to go to the courts. Fake reviews will be tackled by consulting on a new law against:

- commissioning someone to write or submit a fake review
- hosting consumer reviews without taking reasonable steps to check they are genuine
- offering or advertising to submit, commission or facilitate fake reviews

'Subscription traps' in which businesses make it difficult to exit a contract will also be stopped. Under new rules, businesses must:

- provide clearer information to consumers before they enter a subscription contract
- issue a reminder to consumers that a free trial or low-cost introductory offer is coming to an end, and a reminder before a contract auto-renews onto a new term
- ensure consumers can exit a contract in a straightforward, cost-effective and timely way

The enforcement of consumer law is also being strengthened. In the 3 years from 2018 to 2019 to 2020 to 2021, the CMA's actions provided a direct financial benefit to consumers worth £7.7 billion. Today's announcement will build on this success.

The CMA, instead of a court, will be able to award compensation to consumers and directly impose financial penalties for:

- breaking consumer protection laws, with penalties worth up to 10% of global annual turnover for businesses or up to £300,000 in the case of an individual
- breaching undertakings given to the CMA, with penalties worth up to 5% of a business' annual global turnover or up to £150,000 for an individual, and additional daily penalties for continued non-compliance
- non-compliance with an information notice, concealing evidence or providing false information, with penalties worth up to 1% of a

business' annual global turnover or up to £30,000 for an individual, and additional daily penalties for continued non-compliance

The government is also supporting consumers and traders to resolve more disputes without court action by improving Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) services in consumer markets. This includes amending the ADR Regulations 2015 to improve the quality and oversight of ADR services, and requiring businesses offering consumers dispute resolution services to be accredited against these regulations.

Matthew Upton, Director of Policy at Citizens Advice, said:

With pressure piling on household budgets, it's good to see action that'll make it easier for people to protect their cash.

The measures to deal with subscription traps are particularly welcome. We hope these will help bring unscrupulous traders to book and stop shoppers being duped by underhand tactics.

Today's new measures to shield online consumers from rip-offs including fake reviews and subscription traps will apply in England, Scotland and Wales. Consumer protection is devolved in Northern Ireland.

Boosting competition

Illegal anticompetitive conduct will be tackled through new measures including strengthening the CMA's evidence-gathering powers and ensuring competition law protects UK consumers from anticompetitive conduct wherever it is carried out, such as companies colluding to bump up prices. Government is also increasing the ability for the CMA to fine businesses abusing their market position, even in smaller markets, by reducing the minimum turnover threshold for immunity from financial penalties from £50 million to £20 million.

On mergers, to reduce bureaucracy and keep the burden on smaller businesses to a minimum, government will exclude mergers between small businesses – where each party's UK turnover is less than £10 million – from the CMA's merger control altogether. The government is also improving the CMA's ability to review 'killer acquisitions' where big businesses snap up prospective rivals before they can launch new services or products.

The government is giving the CMA greater powers to sanction companies refusing to comply with investigations and remedies. Penalties worth up to 1% of a business' annual worldwide turnover can be imposed for non-compliance with the CMA's investigative measures, and up to 5% of annual turnover for non-compliance with remedies. Additional daily penalties can be applied if non-compliance continues.

So the CMA can use market inquiries to its full potential, the government is creating more opportunities for firms to offer binding commitments to resolve

concerns, as well as the ability for the CMA to apply more flexible market investigation remedies.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

This is an important milestone towards strengthening the CMA's ability to hold companies to account, promote fair and open markets, and protect UK consumers.

The CMA stands ready to assist the government to ensure that legislation can be brought forward as quickly as possible, so consumers and businesses can benefit.

Competition law is reserved and therefore extends to the whole of the UK.

Notes to editors

New measures requiring legal changes, such as tackling fake reviews, will come into effect on a commencement date that will follow parliamentary approval.

Today's announcement follows the 'reforming competition and consumer policy' consultation launched last year. The government received feedback from businesses, consumers groups, regulators and others to ensure today's reforms provide for the strong and proportionate competition and consumer law and enforcement that consumers and businesses need to thrive.

Consumer protection is devolved to Northern Ireland but reserved for Scotland and Wales. Consumer advice and advocacy were devolved to Scotland on 23 May 2016 by the Scotland Act. Competition policy is reserved for the whole of the United Kingdom.

The government is seeking further evidence on how best to help regulators stamp out other dodgy tactics used to dupe online shoppers. These include 'dark patterns' that manipulate consumers into spending more than they wanted to, and 'sludges' – negative nudges such as when businesses add on extra charges for a product before checkout, on top of the advertised price.

The government is also updating and simplifying the Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangement Regulations 2018, allowing easier enforcement and compliance with the law by businesses, better flexibility for insolvency protection for non-flight packages and enabling BEIS to improve the quality of information and guidance available.

As the CMA deals with more cross-border cases following EU exit, we are also developing closer ties with our international partners. The government is making overseas disclosures of information held by a UK competition or consumer authority more streamlined, and introducing new powers on investigative assistance.

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investigative assistance.

Britain moves closer to a self-driving revolution

- government sets out changes to The Highway Code to ensure the first self-driving vehicles are introduced safely on UK roads
- changes clarify drivers' responsibilities in self-driving vehicles, including when a driver must be ready to take back control
- future technology could improve and level up transport, easing congestion, cutting emissions and reducing collisions caused by human error

Drivers will be able to experience the full benefits of the first self-driving vehicles when they arrive, as government sets out how they should be driven safely on UK roads.

The government has today (20 April 2022) confirmed planned changes to The Highway Code, responding to a public consultation, continuing to pave the way for safer, more efficient travel.

The changes to the code will help ensure the first wave of technology will be used safely, explaining clearly that while travelling in self-driving mode, motorists must be ready to resume control in a timely way if they are prompted to – such as when they approach motorway exits.

The plans also include a change to current regulation, allowing drivers to view content that is not related to driving on built-in display screens, while the self-driving vehicle is in control. It will, however, still be illegal to use mobile phones in self-driving mode, given the greater risk they pose in distracting drivers as shown in research.

With self-driving technology rapidly developing across the globe, Britain's first vehicles approved for self-driving could be ready for use later this year. Vehicles will undergo rigorous testing and only be approved as self-driving when they have met stringent standards.

The government is continuing to develop a full legal framework for self-driving vehicles to enable the safer and greener movement of people and goods in the UK. The Department for Transport will also work with industry, regulators and safety organisations to ensure drivers can access information, including online, to help them use the vehicles safely.

Transport Minister Trudy Harrison said:

This is a major milestone in our safe introduction of self-driving vehicles, which will revolutionise the way we travel, making our future journeys greener, safer and more reliable.

This exciting technology is developing at pace right here in Great Britain and we're ensuring we have strong foundations in place for drivers when it takes to our roads.

In doing so, we can help improve travel for all while boosting economic growth across the nation and securing Britain's place as a global science superpower.

The development of self-driving vehicles could create around 38,000 new, high-skilled jobs within Britain's industry that would be worth £41.7 billion by 2035.

The measures confirmed today follow a [public consultation launched by the government](#), which found the majority of respondents were broadly supportive of the proposed changes to The Highway Code to clarify drivers' responsibilities in self-driving vehicles.

The introduction of the technology is likely to begin with vehicles travelling at slow speeds on motorways, such as in congested traffic.

Following a landmark call for evidence, the government announced in April last year that [vehicles fitted with automated lane keeping system \(ALKS\) technology could be the first example of self-driving technology](#). Existing technology available on the market is 'assistive', meaning drivers must currently always remain in control and responsible.

Designed for use on a motorway in slow traffic, ALKS enables a vehicle to drive itself in a single lane, up to 37 mph, while maintaining the ability to return control easily and safely to the driver when required.

Meanwhile, the government expects to have a full regulatory framework in place to support the widespread deployment of the technology by 2025, helping to make the movement of people and goods safer, greener and more efficient.

The technology could improve road safety across Britain by reducing human error, which is a contributory factor in 88% of all recorded road collisions.

Steve Gooding, director of the RAC Foundation, said:

The Highway Code has been updated a number of times in recent years to reflect the rapidly changing transport world we live in and these latest additions will help us all understand what we must and must not do as we move forward to an environment where cars drive themselves.

The final part of the jigsaw is to ensure these amendments are

widely communicated to, and understood by, vehicle owners. Vehicle manufacturers and sellers will have a vital role to play in ensuring their customers fully appreciate the capabilities of the cars they buy and the rules that govern them.

Self-driving technology in cars, buses and delivery vehicles could spark the beginning of the end of urban congestion, with traffic lights and vehicles speaking to each other to keep traffic flowing, reducing emissions and improving air quality in our towns and cities.

The technology could also improve access to transport for people with mobility issues and lead to more reliable public transport services, helping to level-up access to transport in historically disconnected and rural areas.

Mike Hawes, SMMT Chief Executive, said:

Amending The Highway Code to reflect the pace of technological change will help clarify what motorists can and can't do when a self-driving feature is engaged, so promoting its safe use.

The technology could be available in the UK later this year and, with the right regulations in place, consumers are set to benefit from safer, more efficient journeys while the UK will strengthen its position as a global leader in the deployment of self-driving technology.

[New pilot requirement for tree suppliers announced to strengthen UK biosecurity](#)

A new requirement for the forestry sector will be piloted to combat the threat from pests and diseases and further strengthen UK biosecurity, Defra and the Forestry Commission announced today (Wednesday 20 April).

The Biosecure Procurement Requirement means that, from June 2022, applicants for funding under the England Woodland Creation Offer and the Future Farming Tree Health Pilot must commit to sourcing their trees from suppliers who are either accredited under the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme or who have passed a [Ready to Plant assessment, as provided by Fera Science Ltd](#).

The threat of pests and disease is significant and growing as a result of globalisation and climate change. Introducing the Biosecure Procurement

Requirement Pilot now will address these risks to our biosecurity, minimise the net loss to our existing treescape, and serve to realise our long-term vision for our trees and woodlands.

This pilot will enable suppliers to demonstrate that their operational practices comply with the industry benchmark [Plant Health Management Standard](#). This Standard includes protocols which are key to developing a robust plant health management system and sets out practical requirements for suppliers to help protect the plant supply chain.

Professor Nicola Spence, UK Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

Our biosecurity standards are among the highest in Europe. As we build back greener, we must consider new and ambitious ways to not simply maintain these standards but further strengthen them.

By leading the way with this new pilot, we are addressing the significant and increasing threat of pests and diseases and building a strong biosecurity culture across the country.

Sir William Worsley, Forestry Commission Chair, said:

Our nation's biosecurity will be integral to the success of our tree planting ambitions.

This pilot will ensure that the forestry sector plays its role in upholding rigorous standards of biosecurity and in doing so, safeguards our much-loved trees and forests for generations to come.

The launch of the Biosecure Procurement Requirement Pilot fulfils a commitment within the England Trees Action Plan, which sets out our long-term plan for England's trees, woodlands and forests. Healthy trees and plants benefit people, the environment, and the economy. Protecting the long-term welfare of our treescapes will underpin Government efforts to treble tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament and plant 30,000 hectares of trees across the UK per year by 2025, as well as form part of wider efforts to achieve Net Zero by 2050.

For more information on the Biosecure Procurement Pilot Requirement, [read this Forestry Commission blog](#).

The Biosecure Procurement Requirement Pilot will run for 12 months from June 2022.

Call for bids: The Latin American Regional Investigative Journalism Project 2022

Overview

- The Combatting Illicit Economies Programme (“CIEP”) is a programme funded through the UK’s Conflict Stability and Security Fund. It partners with countries in Latin America to tackle threats including serious organised crime (from drugs to money laundering to environmental crime), grand corruption and instability/conflict.
- Primarily, the CIEP does this through an illicit economies approach: tackling the corrupt and criminal networks operating transnationally and through a focus on the illicit finances that sustain them.
- The CIEP seeks to maintain a constant understanding of illicit finance mechanisms, threats and modalities in region recognizing that those dynamics are constantly evolving. As part of this approach, we are seeking to partner with a suitable implementer to undertake a regional investigative journalism project over a 3 year period and which focuses on the dynamics of corruption, serious and organized crime and illicit economies impacting Latin America.
- We recognize that illicit finances are a transnational issue and do not respect (indeed, exploit weaknesses at) international borders. For that reason, the project should take a regional approach in terms of following illicit flows around Latin America. However, we expect that journalists or journalist networks within CIEP focus countries – Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela – would be the principal beneficiaries of project funding.

Bid Priorities

- Proposals should demonstrate a clear strategy by which investigative journalism can be used to analyse, provide evidence and raise awareness around the interplay of transparency and corruption dynamics, organised crime and illicit financial flows within Latin America. Successful bidders should outline a series of project outputs that will support the achievement of an outcome or outcomes linked to the strategy.

- As stated, the CIEP is particularly interested in how criminal and illicit financing works cross-region, sustaining illicit economies of concern in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. Recognizing the transnational nature of illicit financial flows, projects that can show how they will build inter-regional collaboration (that is to say the promotion of investigative journalism initiatives across multiple countries/territories) will be preferred.
- Bidders are otherwise encouraged to develop their own proposal incorporating innovative approaches to strengthening the capacity of investigative journalism in the region. Nonetheless – and although in no way prescriptive – the following indicative criteria might guide bidders in so far as they are able to:
 1. Demonstrate a track-record of producing transnational investigative journalism around corruption, serious organized crime and illicit economies. A focus on illicit finances, money laundering and corruption is most appropriate to the CIEP's aims, including how these typologies interact with broader illicit economies.
 2. Produce initiatives that will increase coverage (particularly in the CIEP focus countries of Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela) of investigations/stories with the desired thematic focus and, particularly, that are trans-regional in scope;
 3. Demonstrate a proven capacity to assist media outlets/organizations throughout the region in their investigations including editorial, legal, and security advice;
 4. Have awareness of – and a proven capacity to deliver/enhance – the platforms and instruments that will enhance the capacity of journalists in CIEP focus countries to undertake investigative journalism in the core thematic areas and including in editorial, legal, and security matters;
 5. Produce a clear and detailed, multi-year strategy of impact showing how the resourcing of this project would lead to an improvement in the capacity of journalists/journalist organizations to work on the identified themes (particularly trans-regionally/trans-nationally) over the project's lifetime;
 6. Rely upon a pre-existing presence (or proven ability to work) in the CIEP focus countries – Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. The project need not have a permanent base in each of these countries and can operate from one or more with regional reach; and

7. Gender mainstream activities across the project lifecycle to ensure a gender-sensitive approach that demonstrates compliance with UK Equality Act 2010. The project must be underpinned by a gender analysis that is monitored and updated regularly, and that demonstrably shapes the project's design and implementation, with concrete commitments and action demonstrating the project is suitably privileging gender.
- In terms of the desired impact of the project, again, we invite bidders to suggest their own bespoke approaches to demonstrating the impact of their activity. The CIEP itself operates an 'outcome harvesting' approach to monitoring and evaluating its activity across the region and the successful implementer would be expected to adopt similar processes in collaboration with the programme.
 - The project implementer will need to be (or be aligned to) a not-for-profit or non-governmental organization as required by Official Development Assistance obligations (see below).

Scope and Scale of Project

- The total project bid should not exceed GBP£900,000 over a three-year period (starting April 2022 through to March 2025). We are open to considering different proposals as to how that funding might be split over the three-year period
- Because of the nature of the CIEP's funding, resource cannot be guaranteed beyond one-year windows within the three-year project life-cycle. Break clauses will be included within the documentation governing the grant and a review of activity, impact and general grant compliance will take place at the end of each UK financial year and before funding can be released for additional years.
- The proposal should provide the specific outcomes, outputs and activity the project aims to deliver. Each output should be linked to clear indicators, milestones and target dates. The CIEP welcomes suggestions as to innovative methods of achieving results/impact against the broad themes proposed as focus areas of the project. Details of these methods should be captured in the project proposal and work plan accompanying the bid.
- The bidder should also state in the proposal the scope and scale of the personnel, resource and time required to complete the project, its activities and achieve the outputs.

- The successful bidder would be expected to be able to operate in Spanish and English. For international organizations expecting to sub-contract delivery to regional implementers, a clear strategy for control and management of these sub-contracted relationships will be required. Whilst not a disqualifying criteria, it would be anticipated that a Spanish-speaking management team would be in place (likely in region but possibly remotely) to manage downstream implementation.
- The project should ensure gender mainstreaming, risk mitigation strategy, and conflict sensitivity.

Official Development Assistance

- All expenditures must qualify as ODA. Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a term created by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to measure aid. ODA should be undertaken by the official sector (official agencies, including state and local governments, or their executive agencies) and has promotion of economic development and welfare as the main objective.

Confidentiality

- The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office seeks no editorial control over the activity produced through the funding of this project, trusting instead the successful implementer to support the development of investigative journalism of interest and relevance to the region whilst upholding relevant legal and integrity standards. Consequently, it is not anticipated that any particular British Embassy nor the British Government itself would be expressly referred or linked to within the individual outputs of the project (i.e. individual articles, events etc).
- In so far as there is scope to make reference to or publicise the British Embassy/British Government's involvement in the project, this will be discussed and agreed with the successful bidder upon award of the grant/contract but usually will be decided on a case by case basis.

Essential skills and competencies of the implementer

- The successful implementer will have:

1. Experience working on the relevant issues identified in this document;

2. Network of contacts in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Venezuela.
 3. Experience of developing training sessions for journalists and producing transnational investigative pieces in issues related to corruption, illicit economies and illicit finances;
 4. Familiarity with challenges and solutions related to investigative journalism of thematic including specifically illicit finances, money laundering and corruption (but also including how they link to broader illicit economies such as illegal mining, drugs, environmental crime etc);
 5. Proven project and budget management experience, including mitigation of risks to ensure the project is delivered effectively.
 6. Fluent Spanish is essential for operating in the region.
 7. Fluent English is essential for drafting communications and financial reports.
 8. Policy or Programme experience in Latin America.
- Private consultancy firms, consortia of multidisciplinary experts or non-profit organisations can participate in this call for bids.

How to bid: General Guidance on Project Proposals

- Stage 1: Bidders are invited to submit by 15 of May 2022, 11.59pm Bogotá time, to CSSF.CIEP@fco.gov.uk, the following documentation:
 1. Full proposal (template attached)
 2. Activity Based (template attached)
 3. Work plan (bidder's own template)
 4. Risk register (bidder's own template)
- Stage 2: The CIEP Programme technical committee will evaluate all proposals based on the above requirement. A decision is anticipated to take place end of May 2022
- Stage 3: The CIEP Programme team will seek to notify the successful bidder by June 2022 and start project mobilisation / set up afterwards.

Duty of Care

The implementer is responsible for the safety and well-being of their personnel and third parties affected by their activities under this grant agreement, including appropriate security arrangements. They will also be responsible for the provision of suitable security arrangements for their domestic and business property. HMG will share available information with the implementer on security status and developments in country where appropriate.

The implementer is responsible for ensuring appropriate safety and security briefings for all of their personnel working under this contract and ensuring that their personnel register and receive briefing as outlined above. Travel advice is also available on the FCDO website and the implementer must ensure they (and their personnel) are up to date with the latest position.

Tenderers must develop their tender response on the basis of being fully responsible for Duty of care in line with the details provided above. They must confirm in their tender that:

1. They fully accept responsibility for security and duty of care;
2. They understand the potential risks and have the knowledge and experience to develop an effective risk plan; and
3. They have the capability to manage their duty of care responsibilities throughout the life of the contract.

Acceptance of responsibility must be supported with evidence of capability. In providing evidence, Tenderers should consider the following questions:

1. Have you completed an initial assessment of potential risks that demonstrates your knowledge and understanding, and are you satisfied that you understand the risk management implications (not solely relying on information provided by FCDO)?
2. Have you prepared an outline plan that you consider appropriate to manage these risks at this stage (or will you do so if you are awarded the contract) and are you confident/comfortable that you can implement this effectively?
3. Have you an appropriate mechanism in place to monitor risk on a live/on-going basis (or will you put one in place if you are awarded the contract)?
4. Have you ensured or will you ensure that your staff are provided with,

and have access to, suitable equipment and will you ensure that this is reviewed and provided on an on-going basis?

5. Have you appropriate systems in place to manage an emergency/incident if one arises?

Gender sensitivity

The FCDO views gender equality and women's rights as central to promoting peace and stability overseas. This project will take into account any gender-related differences where data is available; consider its contribution to reducing inequality between persons of different gender; and ensure that the project does no harm to any particular gender group.

As such, gender must be fully integrated across all aspects of the intervention. The project design must be underpinned by a gender analysis that is monitored and updated regularly, and that demonstrably shapes the project's design and implementation, with concrete commitments and action demonstrating the project is suitably privileging gender.

The work plan and project monitoring mechanism must set out how the implementer proposes to adopt a gender-sensitive approach that demonstrates compliance with UK Equality Act 2010. The implementer is expected to mainstream gender in all activities of the project by integrating a gender equality perspective that takes into account the needs of all beneficiaries, men, women and LGBTQ+ people.

Conflict sensitivity

The FCDO requires implementers to take a robust approach to conflict sensitivity. This includes going beyond 'do no harm' principles to include maximising opportunities for positive effect on peacebuilding and conflict dynamics, such as improved community relations, enhanced mediation, and good governance

The FCDO also expects implementers to demonstrate an understanding of how the project might affect/is affected by extremist groups and can contribute to addressing drivers and enablers of violent extremism. This requires a well elaborated conflict sensitivity plan, including how conflict sensitivity will be brought into design (including processes, baseline analysis), implementation, monitoring, evaluation and lessons learning, and conflict sensitive communications. It requires the Implementer to have the required team capacities, and an approach to building the capacity of beneficiaries and other stakeholders on conflict sensitivity.

[Review the Call for bids: Local Legal and Criminal Justice Policy Development Capacity in Support of Programming if interested.](#)